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Glass Garden: Chihuly Blown Glass Translated as Wearable Art

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Keywords: Digital textile printing, Chihuly glass, historic inspiration, blown glass

Contextual Review and Concept

Submission context. From the first time I saw a Chihuly sculpture, I thought it would be an intriguing challenge to create a garment that captured the shapes, colors, and transparency of the work. Dale Chihuly's sculptures rely on overlapping transparent glass shapes in a wide variety of colors, and the effect of light in the sculptures is a crucial component of the design. Pasricha (2015) translated Chihuly glass into a needle-felted design as a way of integrating two different art forms, incorporating the forms and colors of Chihuly glass as decorative elements on a garment.

Design concept. The purpose of this dress is to translate a Chihuly glass sculpture into a unified composition using the principle of the circular shapes of Chihuly's sculptures and capturing the many colors and transparency of the original art, incorporating historic inspiration from 1950s dresses that is reminiscent of the shapes present in the glass. This design builds on the concept of translating Chihuly glass sculpture into garment design (Pasricha, 2015), using digital textile printing technology and sheer fabric appliqués to bring a completely different look to the representation of Chihuly in textile art.

Process, Technique, and Execution

The digitally-printed fabric design is a repeat print based on a photograph by Karista Bennett of a Chihuly glass ceiling (used with permission). The complexity of the original image, which included approximately 30 overlapping pieces of glass, complicated the process of converting the image to a repeat print. To convert the image to a half-drop repeat, the process recommended by Bowles and Isaac (2009) was followed, using the offset filter to rearrange the image. The offset filter creates lines through the image which then need to be blended back into the design. To create a seamless design, I used the liquefy tool in Adobe Photoshop to pull the image across the lines created by the offset filter, supplemented with the clone stamp and the healing brush. Part of the largest glass piece in the photograph was missing due to the composition of the picture; I reconstructed the missing portion of the sculpture by copying and transposing sections of the image. The design was printed on cotton sateen.

Chihuly's bowl-shaped works are reminiscent of the full skirts of 1950s dresses, a connection that is explored in this work. The midriff and the bodice back were created using the flat pattern method. I drafted the circle skirt pattern and draped the bust pleats, which were then tacked into place on a darted lining. The bodice is lined and closes on the side seam with a vintage metal zipper, and the hem is faced with bias tape and slip stitched for an invisible finish.

Iridescent silk organza yoyos applied to the garment mimic the layered, transparent effects of Chihuly's sculptures and add a three-dimensional element to the two-dimensional fabric design.

Aesthetic Properties, Visual Impact and Cohesion

Although this textile design cannot be mistaken for glass, the shapes, luminous colors, and transparency of the original sculptures are present in this textile representation of Chihuly's work, expressed in both the digitally printed fabric and in the silk organza yoyos. The circles prevalent in the sculpture are repeated in the shapes of the circle skirt and the yoyo appliques. Referencing the striped effects seen in Chihuly's sculptures, the bust was shaped using a curved pleated design, creating a variation of the shelf bust inspired by 1950s dress designs. In creating this dress, I combined digital technology with traditional dressmaking techniques to integrate glass art, textile design, and historic inspiration into a contemporary design.

Design Contribution and Innovation

This work builds upon Pasricha's (2015) work by adding the effects of light and transparency to textile interpretations of Chihuly sculpture via digital printing and sheer fabrics, and by incorporating the shape of the sculptures into the garment design. The design brings the essential aesthetics of a three-dimensional sculpture into a two-dimensional form, which is then recast as a three-dimensional wearable design. Digital printing is ideal for this type of design, as the numerous colors required would render the project impractical for traditional printing methods. Future explorations into the translation of glass sculpture into textiles might utilize engineered prints to further accentuate the connection between the glass shape and the garment shape and/or add wearable LED lights to highlight the effects of overlapping sheer fabrics in mimicking layered blown glass.

References

- Bowles, M., & Isaac, C. (2009). *Digital textile design / Melanie Bowles, Ceri Isaac*. (Portfolio skills. Fashion & textiles). London: Laurence King.
- Pasricha, A. (2015). *Glass to Fabric: Dale Chihuly's Blown Glass Inspired Design*. Design Presented at *International Textile and Apparel Association (ITAA) Annual Conference*, Santa Fe, NM.

